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ABSTRACT

The proceedings of the inaugural session of this UNESCO-sponsored seminar, which reviewed new developments in higher education in the Asia and Pacific region and formulated a proposal for the establishment of a regional resource center for distance education, are presented in four chapters. The first introduces the seminar's purpose, summarizes its major conclusions, and lists seminar participants. The second chapter contains the text of a proposal for the establishment of a regional resource center which outlines: (1) the rationale for the center; (2) its projected scope, function, organization, and structure; (3) anticipated sources of revenue for its support; and (4) the initiative of the Asian Association of Open Universities in establishing the center. Resolutions of the seminar are presented in the third chapter, and the final chapter contains minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Asian Association of Open Universities. Appended are speeches presented at the inaugural session and a list of participants and their addresses. (GL)

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**Regional Co-operative Programme
in Higher Education for Development
in Asia and the Pacific**

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***REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE
IN DISTANCE EDUCATION***

(Report of the founding seminar)

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UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, 1989

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Regional Co-operative Programme
in Higher Education for Development
in Asia and the Pacific

*REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE
IN DISTANCE EDUCATION*

(Report of the founding seminar)



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Bangkok, 1989

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education was held at the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Nonthaburi, Thailand from 27 June to 1 July 1988. The seminar was convened by UNESCO in co-operation with the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and the Asian Association of Open Universities within the framework provided by UNESCO's Regional Co-operative Programme in Higher Education for Development in Asia and the Pacific.

The need for the establishment of a regional resource centre in distance education had been stressed in various regional workshops and meetings. Views had been expressed that the time was appropriate for the establishment of such a centre and that expertise was widely available within the distance education community in the region which could profitably be shared by all. It was logical that as a further step to cement this idea, an initial centre should be established in one of the existing universities.

Mr. Suthee Argaslerksh, Permanent Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand presided over the opening ceremony. In his opening address, Mr. Argaslerksh stressed the fact that the establishment of the regional resource centre reflected the vast strides made in distance education and that in keeping with the economic importance the Asia-Pacific area was assuming, the region must have the educational resources to match. He further stated that the newly founded Asian Association of Open Universities boded well for the success of a regional resource centre.

Prof. Dr. Iam Chaya-Ngam, Rector of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, in his welcoming address pointed out that the proposed regional resource centre was an evidence of the foresight and astuteness of those who were concerned with the expansion of distance education in the region for the improvement of the economic and social quality of people in all walks of life. He assured that his university would extend its sincere willingness to work towards a permanent and prosperous regional resource

centre. He thanked UNESCO for its generous assistance and co-operation which had been instrumental in making the seminar possible.

Dr. Makaminan Makagiansar, Assistant Director-General for Co-ordination of UNESCO Activities in Asia and the Pacific and Director, UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in his inaugural address reiterated UNESCO's deep commitment to distance education. He thanked the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and the Asian Association of Open University for joining UNESCO in organizing the seminar. He said that the establishment of a resource centre would further contribute to bringing the distance teaching institutions closer to each other for mutual benefit. However, Dr. Makagiansar cautioned that not all attempts to establish a centre of this kind and make it work effectively had proved successful. The centre, therefore, should have clear objectives and set out a work plan which was realistic and of immediate interest to user institutions. The co-operating institutions must also give their full support to the centre.

Prof. Dr. Wichit Srisa-an, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of University Affairs, in his keynote address gave a brief synopsis of the background leading to the seminar and outlined the scope and the functions of the proposed regional resource centre. He was confident that with the expertise present at the seminar and the papers which had been previously prepared by the participants, the foundation for a regional resource centre would be laid. (Text of speeches at the inaugural session are attached as Appendix A.)

The seminar was attended by heads and senior academics and professionals from the following universities and organizations: Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (Australia), Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia), University of the Air (Japan), National Institute of Multi-Media Education (Japan), Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), Korea Air and Correspondence University (Republic of Korea), Open University of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka), Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand), Asian Development Bank (Philippines), UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok), University of New England (Australia), Asian Institute of Technology (Thailand). (List of participants is attached as Appendix B.)

Dr. Iam Chaya-Ngam (Thailand) chaired the seminar. Dr. G.A. Allana (Pakistan) and Dr. L.J. Barker (Australia) acted as the Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur respectively.

The seminar reviewed new developments in higher education in the region and formulated a proposal for the establishment of the regional resource centre in distance education. The proposal incorporated in this report, was unanimously adopted by the participants of the seminar in the final session held on 1 July 1988.

Chapter Two

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE TO SUPPORT DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Introduction

Representatives of nine distance education institutions met at a seminar arranged by UNESCO and The Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) in June 1988. As a result of the deliberations at the seminar and the pressing need expressed at various regional workshops and meetings held recently by UNESCO, it was proposed that a regional centre to support the provision of distance education at post-secondary level in the region be established.

The proposal is presented in two parts:

PART A is intended as a submission to funding authorities and is therefore of a somewhat general nature. It seeks to establish the needs and to outline the solutions. Primarily, it is intended as a basis to establish the potential impact of the Regional Resource Centre within the region.

PART B describes the initiative of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) adopted at this seminar. This initiative was developed because the seminar participants believe that the matter is urgent and the needs are such that some forms of immediate action must be taken. In due course, it is expected that demonstrated success will encourage governments and other agencies to provide necessary support.

PART A:

**Establishment of the Regional Resource Centre
to Support Distance Education in Asia and the Pacific**

Rationale

The educational needs of the Asia-Pacific region are vast and complex. There are no simple solutions, but in recent time the nations of the region have increasingly turned towards distance education as a technique through which large numbers of students, who for various reasons, cannot be accommodated within the conventional system, can be given access to post-secondary education. A number of open universities have been founded in the countries of the region, and their development has led to the establishment of the Asian Association of Open Universities.

Further rapid expansion may be expected, and the demands on existing institutions will soon outstrip their individual capacities. The heads of the AAOU institutions are of the opinion that resources and expertise must be shared between member countries if open university education is to be a powerful force within the region. The most effective method of achieving resource sharing and co-operation is through the establishment of a Regional Resource Centre.

Country reports submitted by participants indicate that each country has its own unique set of higher education requirements. Some of the more urgent and common ones are:

1. The capacity to meet the educational demands of the population that are rapidly increasing and which cannot be serviced through existing conventional institutions.
2. The capacity to meet the educational needs of women.
3. A requirement for the advanced level technical and scientific education necessary to support the development of modern economically efficient societies. Associated with this is the need for continuing re-education of technical and scientific personnel in order to ensure that their skills and knowledge remain current in the face of technological and scientific change.
4. Health education for individuals, families and communities is a vital aspect of developing modern societies. The nations of the region are continually upgrading their

services in order to meet the need for expanded health education. In addition, population studies are necessary to plan the distribution and growth of population within the countries of the region.

5. The techniques and processes of distance education are only partially developed. Further extensive research is necessary to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of materials preparation and delivery. In particular, research is necessary to assess the capabilities and teaching efficiency of new developments in communications technology.
6. At present, the level of skills of instructors working in distance education is not of sufficiently high standard. More training opportunities need to be provided for distance education personnel in such fields as instructional design, editorial techniques, production methods, and other areas aimed at providing high quality instructional materials at minimal cost.

The scale of the operations that will be necessary are so large that sharing of materials from well-established courses and the co-operative development of teaching materials in new areas will be essential. This will require the development of data collection on the availability and nature of teaching materials throughout the region and a system through which this data can be readily disseminated to the individual and participating centres. There is clearly a need to set up a Regional Resource Centre with the objectives to meet the needs stated above.

Scope and Function of the Regional Resource Centre

It is essential that the Centre should be an active one. It must constantly seek out information from throughout the region and take every opportunity to disseminate such information to the participating centres and institutions. The Centre personnel must possess management, marketing and communication skills. All of these will be necessary to develop and maintain a programme of vigorous communication with appropriate personnel working in distance education throughout the region.

Some specific functions will include:

Data-base Function: This will involve the establishment and maintenance of a data-base containing information about the institutions, their programmes, key personnel, course offerings and available instructional materials.

Documentation Function: This will involve the collection of suitable descriptive material on texts and other printed materials, broadcast materials, audio-visual tapes. All materials will be classified and the descriptions of their contents and application made available to user members. Other services will include the provision of storage of sample materials where necessary, and the translation into English of such materials as may be required by the end users.

Information-communication Network: The establishment and facilitation of a support, information and communication network between the participating institutions. Such a network would have several usages but would basically be concerned with assisting rapid inter-institutional communication and with enabling the business of the Centre to be carried out as efficiently as possible.

Facilitation of Co-operative Production and Use of Distance Teaching Resources: This would involve co-operative effort across the whole spectrum of distance education activities. Some specific examples would include: a) joint production of course materials; b) sharing existing teaching resources; c) adapting existing teaching resources; d) sharing expertise and facilities; and e) translation of materials.

Training and Conferences: The arrangement of training programmes, conferences and similar activities for academic and technical personnel engaged in distance education. Areas to be included would be: a) production of audio-visual materials; b) the development and use of appropriate computer-based courseware and associated software; and c) the development of distance teaching techniques through the use of interactive electronic media, for example, radio, telephone and television.

Distance Education Research Function: The organization of co-operative research programmes aimed at extending knowledge of the processes and techniques of distance education, particularly as they apply to the Asia-Pacific region.

Organization and Structure of the Regional Resource Centre

The Regional Resource Centre will function as a professional support service providing information and facilitating material exchanges throughout the region. The major activities of the Centre will be centered around information, training and provision of services that will permit the development of more efficient and effective distance education programmes within the region.

It is envisaged that the RRC will in time become a formal legal entity governed by an Executive Council and located at one of the major open universities.

In the course of its operation, the Centre will utilize the services and facilities of its member organizations. It is not expected that Centre staff will play any direct role in materials development and production. Instead the Centre will concentrate on organization and facilitation.

Finance

Revenue for the support of the Centre and its activities will be derived from:

- a) grants from AAOU;
- b) income earned from material sales and from services arranged;
- c) contributions from Centre members in cash and/or kind;
- d) contributions from appropriate funding agencies; and
- e) any unilateral or multi-lateral or other funding arrangements that can be negotiated with specific countries.

PART B:

Initiative of the Asian Association of Open Universities

Introduction

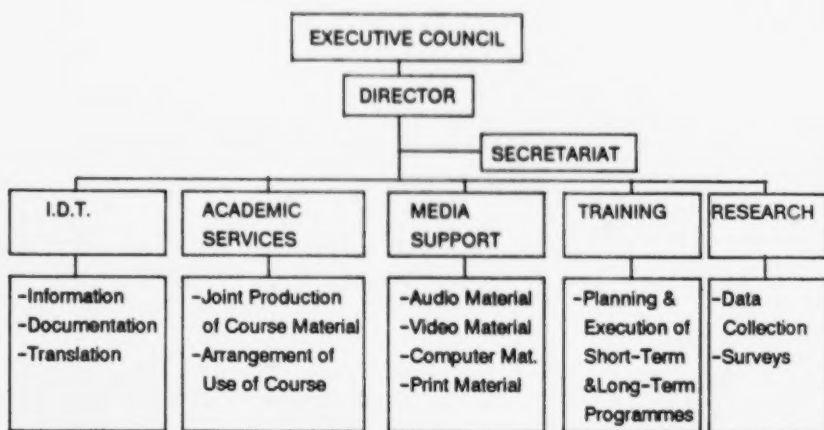
It can be seen that the matters set out in the rationale supporting the establishment of the Regional Resource Centre are such that a degree of urgency exists. The AAOU Executive Committee has therefore decided to immediately establish the Regional Resource Centre in association with The Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University.

The AAOU initiative demonstrates the recognition of need and a commitment to action on the part of the major distance education institutions within the region.

Organization and Structure

Initially the RRC will be a body set up by a resolution of the AAOU. "Start up" staff will be provided by STOU and will be asked to prepare a constitution and commence operations under the general supervision of the Rector of the University. Operations will commence by no later than July 31, 1988 in lines with the initial activities and programmes outlined later in the document. The founding members of the Centre shall be the distance education institutions represented at this seminar.

ORGANIZATION CHART



The Executive Council: When considered necessary and practicable by the AAOU Executive Committee, an Executive Council shall be constituted. The membership shall be:

- a) AAOU Executive Committee Members;
- b) one representative from UNESCO;
- c) not more than three representatives from other member institutions;
- d) two to four representatives of donor and/or supporting agencies; and
- e) the Director of the RRC as a Member Secretary.

The President of the AAOU shall be the "ex officio" chairman of the Executive Council.

Term of Office: Three years with provision for re-appointment.

Quorum: Four members or one-third of the membership, whichever is greater.

Constitution and Powers: An initial task of the Council shall be to further develop and approve the draft constitution prepared by the Honorary Director.

Staffing

The initial staff (including the Director and the Secretariat) will be provided by STOU. Additional staff will be added from time to time depending on the availability of funds and the level of the workload generated by the Centre's activities.

The appointment of a permanent Director is seen as a key decision and will significantly influence the ultimate success of the project. The Director should:

- a) be academically qualified, preferably a Ph.D.;
- b) be skilled in management, marketing and communications;

matters concerned with the Centre and its relationships with the particular institution.

Initial Activities and Programmes

Three initial projects have been identified:

Project One: Creation of a Distance Education Data Base and a Learning Materials Documentation File

Project Two: Planning and Organizing Appropriate Training Activities

Project Three: Development of a Service Provision Programme

Project One: Creation of a Distance Education Data Base and a Learning Materials Documentation File:

It is expected that the data base would be, in effect, a 'who is who' of distance education which would permit workers in the various countries to be able to identify co-workers in institutions in other countries through their listings. The listing would include their area of expertise and their research and development interests particularly in the field of distance education.

An integrated course directory would also be developed. The institutions would be asked to supply information about themselves including the courses they have available for use by others and under what conditions such usage would be permitted. In due course, this project would be fully computerized and made available to member institutions for a fee. The information would be transmitted to the institutions by means of diskettes or through electronic mail and other appropriate communication technologies.

Project Two: Planning and Organizing Appropriate Training Activities:

It is not expected that the RRC will actually conduct training activities. In certain cases, participants' circumstances might force such a role upon the Centre, but generally, it will facilitate the conduct of training at an institution considered most appropriate for the specific training needs.

Training is required across the whole range of distance education activities. Some of the more important and immediate needs lie in the following fields: a) application of technology to education; b) the development and maintenance of effective outreach networks; c) instructional design; d) graphic design; and e) editorial and presentation skills, etc. associated with the preparation of printed materials.

Project Three: Development of a Service Provision Programme:

The services that could be required by institutions engaged in distance education are extensive. Some of the more important services are considered to be:

- a) specialist communications assistance required to facilitate the co-operative development and production arrangements entered into by member institutions;
- b) teaching materials abstracts preparation;
- c) translation and other language requirement systems;
- d) the development and implementation of personnel exchange programmes between the member institutions; and
- e) consultancy services provided by RRC if and when the occasion arises.

Chapter Three

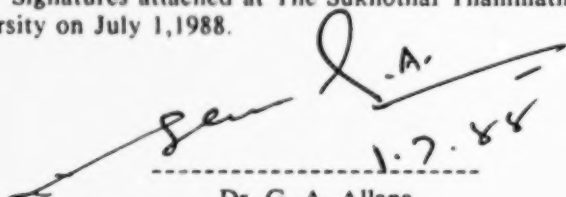
RESOLUTIONS OF THE SEMINAR

1. It was resolved to adopt the report of the seminar.
2. It was resolved that the Regional Resource Centre be located on the campus of The Sukhothai Thammathirath Open University, Thailand.
3. It was resolved that The Sukhothai Thammathirath Open University be requested to provide the initial staff and facility infrastructure.
4. It was resolved that the seminar report be forwarded to the governments of the region with the request for support for the project.
5. It was resolved that the seminar report be forwarded to UNESCO, ADB, and IDRC.
6. It was resolved that ADB be requested to provide technical assistance that will enable a full scale investigation and planning exercise to be mounted with respect to the RRC and its potential to support the provision of distance education within the region.
7. It was resolved that the annual fee structure be:

AAOU members US\$1000
Non-AAOU members US\$2500
8. It was resolved that institutions having representatives present at the seminar as observers be invited to become founding members of the RRC.

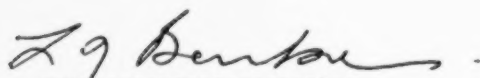
We, the undersigned, agree to confirm the above resolutions as being resolutions of the Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education, held at The Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, sponsored by UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, between June 27 - July 1, 1988.

Signatures attached at The Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University on July 1, 1988.



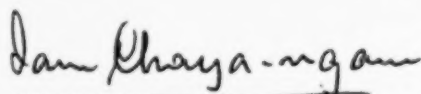
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'G. A. Allana', with the date '1.7.88' written below it.

Dr. G. A. Allana
Vice-Chancellor
Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan



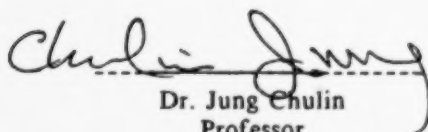
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L. J. Barker'.

Dr. L. J. Barker
Director
Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Australia



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Iam Chaya-Ngam'.

Dr. Iam Chaya-Ngam
Rector
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

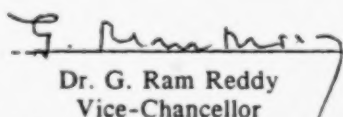


A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Chulin Jung'.

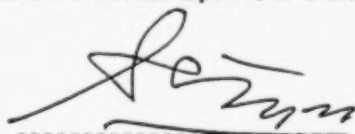
Dr. Jung Chulin
Professor
for Dr. Kwong Soon Chan, President
Korea Air and Correspondence University,
Republic of Korea



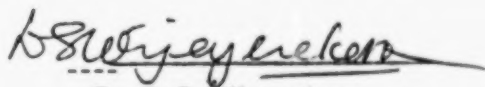
Dr. Yasuo Kobayashi
Vice-President
for Dr. Hideo Katsuki, President
University of The Air
in collaboration with the
National Institute of Multi Media Education, Japan



Dr. G. Ram Reddy
Vice-Chancellor
Indira Gandhi National Open University, India



Dr. Setijadi
Rector
Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia



Dr. D. S. Wijeyesekera
Vice-Chancellor
The Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

Chapter Four

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPEN UNIVERSITIES

The AAOU Executive Committee Meeting was held at The Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University on July 1, 1988 under the chairmanship of the AAOU President, Dr. Iam Chaya-Ngam.

Item 1 : The President's Report on the Office of the Secretariat and the Secretariat Staff

Dr. Chaya-Ngam reported that the temporary AAOU Secretariat Office had been located on the fifth floor of the Office of Documentation and Information Building in the Development Section of STOU. Dr. Chaya-Ngam also reported that he had appointed Dr. Siraporn Thitathan, an Assistant Rector for Development, as Officer-in-Charge, and Miss Puckpornchan Kasemsri, an academic, as AAOU Secretariat staff member.

The Committee adopted the report as presented.

Item 2 : The Secretary-General's Proposal on AAOU News Updating and the Next Seminar and Meeting of the General Body

1. Prof. Dr. G. Ram Reddy, AAOU Secretary-General, suggested that the news concerning the AAOU member institutions be published in the newsletter *Never Too Far* and that the member institutions should send news and information monthly to the Officer-in-Charge.

2. Dr. Reddy proposed that the Association should hold a seminar for AAOU members so that the member institutions could share their experiences, problems, and directions towards future development.

It was adopted that the title of the seminar be "Open Universities of Asia : Problems and Prospects", to be held during June 12-14, 1989 in Pakistan to coincide with the 1989 AAOU General Body Meeting. It was also adopted that each member will pay for

his own air-ticket. Prof. Dr. G. A. Allana, Vice-Chancellor of The Allama Iqbal Open University stated that his university could offer the accommodation for the persons attending the seminar and AAOU General Body meeting. Dr. Allana was thanked for the offer by the members present.

In addition, it was adopted to hold the next four AAOU General Body meetings as follows: a) Pakistan, b) Indonesia, c) Republic of Korea, and d) Sri Lanka.

Item 3 : Finance

Membership Fees: It was adopted that the AAOU membership fee be raised to US\$1,300 (one thousand three hundred dollars) beginning January 1, 1989; US\$1,000 (one thousand dollars) of which will be released to support the operational costs of the Distance Education Regional Resource Centre.

Dr. Chaya-Ngam reported that STOU would be responsible for all AAOU expenses up to July 1, 1988. After that all costs would be drawn from the AAOU membership fees.

AAOU Auditor : Dr. Chaya-Ngam reported that SGV-Na Thalang & Co. Ltd. was willing to do the financial auditing service for the AAOU, possibly free of charge.

The Committee adopted the report as presented.

Honorarium: Dr. Chaya-Ngam proposed an honorarium for the AAOU Officer-in-Charge and staff. The AAOU members agreed that this was appropriate and left the decision to Dr. Chaya-Ngam.

Item 4 : Other Business

Mailing List: The Committee decided that the Secretariat compare the AAOU mailing list with the UNESCO list. Furthermore, each member institution was asked to examine the mailing list and send their updated version (additions or deletions) to the AAOU Secretariat before the mailing list would be released to the public.

Information about Open Universities: The Secretariat was asked to survey and collect detailed information about all existing open universities in Asia and the Pacific, particularly the University of South Pacific - Fiji, the University of Life - The Philippines, and The Central Radio and Television University - Peoples' Republic of China. The information will be presented to the AAOU General Body at its next meeting for consideration of sending invitations to these institutions for future AAOU membership.

Exchange Programmes: Dr. Chaya-Ngam reported that in the past, the University of the Air - Japan and the Korea Air and Correspondence University had sent a number of students to visit STOU.

The Committee agreed that there should be exchange programmes between faculty, staff, students or experts of the member institutions in certain fields and that in the case of exchange programmes between faculty and staff, Unesco financial support should be sought.

The Asian Association of Open Universities Executive Committee Meeting was adjourned at 12:00 a.m.

OPENING ADDRESS

by

Mr. Suthee Argaslerksh

It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you to this Inauguration of the Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education. The presence of so many distinguished academics and representatives bodes well for the success of the regional resource centre which will, I am certain, become an invaluable reference source for those interested in distance education, and serve as a model for other centres yet to come.

It is my firm belief that distance education is a truly fair system for higher education if it is to serve the population as a whole and not just a small group. This is especially true in developing countries where one needs only to look at the increasing number of students registering in distance learning institutions to see the demand for higher education among the people.

The establishment of this centre reflects the vast strides made in distance education in Asia and the Pacific. I have no doubt that academics worldwide will find the centre a role model inasmuch as distance education, no matter where, is basically similar in its goals and principles. Moreover, in keeping with the economic importance the Asia-Pacific area has assumed, we must and will have the educational resources to match and the Regional Resource Centre will be a perfect example of such a facility. In examining the objectives of the proposed centre, it will be seen that the use of the latest printed materials, audio-visual equipment and computers will ensure its effectiveness as a resource centre for the most advanced research.

Boding equally well for its success is the role of the recently organized Asian Association of Open Universities. With academics from so many Asian Countries, each differing in its economic and social situation, participating in the work of the centre, we will be ensured a wide spectrum of experience, views and expertise, without which the centre could not succeed in achieving its goals efficiently.

I would like to express my highest praise for the efforts of all involved in the conception and planning of the Regional Resource Centre, and congratulate you for your foresight and vision. I have only the greatest optimism for the future of the centre.

Finally, I wish to offer my sincere thanks to UNESCO for its generous sponsorship, and to the host, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, for providing the facilities, for without your efforts and assistance, this seminar could not have taken place.

May I now take this opportunity to declare the Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education open.

WELCOME ADDRESS

by

Professor Dr. Iam Chaya-Ngam

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be given the opportunity to welcome Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, guests and observers assembled today for the Inauguration of the Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education.

I would like to thank Mr. Suthee Argaslerksh, Dr. Makam-inan Makagiansar and Dr. Wichit Srisa-an for being able to address this distinguished audience, and to the members of the diplomatic corps who have given their time to be with us this morning. Also, I wish to extend a special recognition to UNESCO PROAP for its generous assistance and co-operation which has been greatly instrumental in making this seminar possible, and to the member institutions of the Asian Association of Open Universities who have worked so closely with UNESCO PROAP and STOU in the preparation of this significant endeavour upon which we are about to embark.

The fact that a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education in Asia and the Pacific is to be initiated within the next few days is evidence of the foresight and astuteness of those who are ardently concerned with the expansion of distance education in this region for the improvement of economic and social quality of people in all walks of life.

A Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education will give academics, institutions and individuals, both inside and outside the region, access to a centre involved in a wide range of undertakings, including study projects, training programmes, research, seminars, workshops, and documentation of distance education materials in all disciplines.

I am convinced that with your support and active participation, this seminar will be both productive and personally rewarding. It is with keen desire that my vision of a permanent and prosperous Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education be realized, and I would like to extend, on behalf of STOU, our sincere willingness to work towards this conclusion.

May I conclude my welcoming address by assuring all the participants of the complete co-operation of the STOU staff and use of our facilities during the duration of the seminar and wish all my friends from abroad a most enjoyable and pleasant stay in Thailand.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

by

Dr. Makaminan Makagiansar

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO and on my own behalf, it is my great pleasure to join Professor Iam in extending you a warm welcome to this regional seminar of key persons on the establishment of a regional resource centre in distance education. We are indeed very happy to sponsor the seminar. This has been possible because of the full support and co-operation of the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University under the leadership of Professor Iam.

We are grateful to His Excellency Mr. Suthee Argaslerksh, Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister for kindly inaugurating this opening session as the chief guest. I must also express our deep thanks and appreciation to Professor Wichit Srisa-an, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of the University Affairs who has kindly accepted to deliver the key-note paper on the main theme of the seminar. His presence is most gratifying to all of us since his personal contribution, as a scholar and an educator, to the development of open universities and distance education is greatly appreciated all over the world.

It is gratifying to see that the heads and senior officials of nine leading distance teaching and open universities and a representative of the Asian Development Bank are assembled here this morning for a week-long deliberation on the issues related to the establishment of a regional resource centre in distance education. Their presence is indicative of their commitment to the ideals of regional co-operation and the value it can offer in the sharing of their rich experiences and expertise. UNESCO is gratified to collaborate in developing distance education with the group of eminent personalities who are running some of the world's largest and most innovative distance and open higher education systems. It is amazing to note that they together currently enrol some 800,000 students and provide a wide variety of courses that can

range from tractor maintenance instruction for the rural farmers to masters and Ph. D. programmes in modern subjects. The total enrolment in the countries represented at this seminar and in China is estimated to be over 2.5 million. This alone confirms that distance education system is emerging as an equal partner with others in the provision of higher education in the region.

While distance education is not the panacea for all the problems of higher education, it is evident that it features prominently in any strategy for reform in higher education in the region. There are three main reasons for this. It has helped many higher education systems to stem the tide of enrolment pressure. If we take the example of China, approximately 40 per cent of the total student population are at the Central Radio and Television University. In Thailand, approximately eight out of every ten students attend the two open universities. Similarly, enrolment has risen significantly at the other open universities which use distance teaching mode.

It leaves no doubt that distance education has been able to create a perceptible liberalizing impact on the higher education system through its many innovative approaches. It has freed the learners from the constraints of excessive academic and administrative rigidities without having to compromise the quality of education and training that are offered. It is most likely, if not inevitable that the system will gradually extend itself to the secondary and junior secondary level where a vast number of youths are out of the formal school system and that this number is steadily increasing.

Distance education has proved to be less expensive because of its scale of operation and because the opportunity costs are minimum. As we all know, higher education is an extremely resource intensive enterprise and its funding is under constant challenge in the face of competing demands on scarce government resources. Given the limited budgets of the government on which they largely survive, they are increasingly forced either to generate additional funds of their own or adopt new measures for cost-efficiency. Both options are difficult. The participation rate in higher education in most countries of the region except for the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand and the industrialized countries is still quite low. Against this background, it looks highly improbable, if not altogether impossible for these countries to create millions of additional student places in the conventional universities. For example, if Pakistan is to have the same enrol-

ment ratio as that of the western world today, it will have to create nearly two million additional student places. The situation is not different or better, for example, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Nepal. The Pakistan example is symbolic but it illustrates the fact that there is a glaring urgency to find suitable alternatives to cope with the ever-rising demands in many countries. Despite the creation of new facilities, thousands of eligible students do not find seats in the higher education institutions and their number will steadily rise as a result of the universalization of primary education and of the expanding base of secondary education along with the current rate of population growth. This certainly calls for the distance education institutions to be forward looking both in their philosophy and approaches. They will have to prepare themselves for a future that could be very different.

The new development in distance education is to be examined in the context of the entire higher education system. The argument today is not about the desirability of distance education; the issue is what form it will take and in which direction it will move. Distance teaching institutions in the region present enormous diversities in respect of their history, size, structure and their academic programmes, reflective of the cultures in which they exist. What is common is that virtually all of them are publicly funded. These diversities constitute their strength and provide elements on which co-operation can be built. We are pleased to see that co-operation among them is growing and that they are fostering a new sense of confidence and pride in the vast intellectual resources that are available within the region. It is now well established that distance education will continue to play a critical role in transforming higher education, which is often criticized as being dysfunctional, into a more powerful instrument of social and economic development.

UNESCO's commitment to distance education is deep as the key words in UNESCO's higher education programme are democratization of opportunities equality of access and the enhancement of quality. During the past five years the UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific had the opportunity of working with all the universities represented at this seminar within the framework provided by its regional programme in higher education for development in Asia and the Pacific. Over seventy leading universities and research institutions from UNESCO's sixteen Member States have formed a network of three consortia around three major programme areas. The present seminar is organized under the Consortium on Innovation.

If I may mention, the programme has been instrumental in providing a new orientation to some 500 distance educators through a series of regional and national seminars and workshops, study visits and attachments. It has brought out a number of publications including the six-monthly newsletter "Never Too Far" published by the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. Another example of growing co-operation is that a number of universities are jointly developing three video programmes and a master degree course in human environment. We are also fortunate to get the support of the Asian Development Bank which recently organized a major regional seminar in co-operation with the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and UNESCO. Through its able representative, Dr. Motilal Sharma, present amongst us today, I wish to convey UNESCO's continued appreciation to the Asian Development Bank for the collaboration between the Bank and the Organization. The regional co-operation assumed a new dimension and got a new impetus when the Asian Association of Open Universities was founded last year. We believe the outcome of the present seminar will further contribute to bringing the institutions closer to each other for mutual benefit.

The idea of a regional resource centre is not a new one. This has been raised at various fora and the founding conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities reiterated the need and the urgency for the establishment of such a centre. Ever since its foundation UNESCO has maintained close contacts with the universities all over the world. As early as 1948, UNESCO initiated and helped to organize an international conference of universities followed by another conference in 1950. This led to the formation of International Association of Universities which serves as a world forum for universities. Again with the initiative and assistance of UNESCO the European Centre for Higher Education was established in 1970 and the Regional Centre for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1978. The International Council for Distance Education is affiliated with UNESCO as a category of a non-government organization and is planning to have a round table dialogue with UNESCO at its forthcoming international conference in Oslo.

We view the importance of the present seminar in the context of UNESCO's overall goal of promoting co-operation and in the specific context of the needs of distance and open universities in the region. We believe that the proposed regional resource centre will prove to be of immense use to the co-operating institutions as it can serve as a documentation centre, a data bank, a

research library and as the initiator and venue of training activities. Perhaps, it can render the greatest service in the area of course and instructional materials development by way of making available the existing materials and offering options for their adaptation through mutual arrangements. This will save us, as Dr. Barker of Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education says in his paper, the painful process of "re-invention of the wheel" every time and consequently reduce cost and ensure quality. The role of the centre as a catalyst, facilitator and initiator is important.

However, if you permit, I would like to make a small note of caution which is that not all attempts at establishing a centre of the kind we have in view and making it work effectively have proved to be successful. This then raises the question what factors operate to make it effective. This question is not easy to answer and the seminar will deliberate on this during the week. One can nevertheless argue that the centre must be clear in its objective and that it must chalk out a work plan that is realistic and of immediate interest to the user institutions and also that the co-operating institutions pledge their full support. My own view is that let us start with a solid foundation even if the operation is small. As for UNESCO, we assure you of our continued support in the best manner possible and within our resource limits.

I must also take this opportunity to express Unesco's congratulations to the distinguished members of the first Executive Committee of the Association of the Open Universities. We are happy that the first meeting of the committee will take place simultaneously with this seminar. I am confident that given the support of this important association, the proposed regional resource centre will be a worthy institution.

Our contemporary world is developing with great speed and thrust as evidenced by the change in human living we experience from day to day. While hatred, human aggressiveness, violence, terrorism and limited warfare mark to a very large extent the relations between nations, we must also recognize that there are many things in life which bring out the best in the human spirit. Education being essentially a process of intellectual and moral regeneration, it behooves on all of us to bring to the young and to the learning community at large, values which enhance cultural vitality and human creativeness in the interest of peace, mutual understanding and respect for each people heritage and identity. UNESCO, as an intellectual organization is called upon to nurture the spirit of international co-operation and for this we

must keep in mind always the particular reference written in the preamble in the UNESCO Constitution which reads:

"...since wars begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed;..."

I hope very much that we will keep this in mind in our deliberations during the days to come and I hope very much that your scholarly and professional contributions will, at the same time, be a contribution to peace in the interest of the millions of young children, men and women, for whom we all carry educational responsibility.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

by

Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-an

I am very honored to have been asked to give the Keynote Address at this significant assembly of prominent administrators and the academics who are about to begin laying the foundations establishing a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education in Asia and the Pacific, a project which attests to the dedication of those present to institute a centre which will develop and flourish for the educational well-being of all.

I have been very inspired during the last few years by the response that has been received by those involved in distance education concerning the possibility of setting up a regional resource centre, and, if I may, would like to take this time to give you a brief synopsis of the background leading to today's seminar.

In 1985 STOU received a letter from the Lord Perry of Walton, Honorary Director of the International Centre for Distance Learning of the United Nations Universities in the United Kingdom. It was this letter which fostered the commencement of correspondence between Lord Perry, and members of open universities in this region concerning the founding of a regional resource centre. As many of you are aware, any institution in the world which wishes to acquire distance-learning materials on a particular subject may, by consulting the International Centre for Distance learning, obtain from its computerized data base, a print-out showing where the needed materials may be located, or a computer disc may be requested which is sent to the institution concerned. This information may be located in any one of over 400 institutions around the world.

The ICDL, in itself, is worthy of mention as it has taken the steps to organize a system whereby we can check to see if the needed materials are available and whether they would be suitable

for use in our respective institutions.

However, there are drawbacks to having just this one centre for retrieving information, namely: travel expense and consumption of time. Therefore, it was proposed that consideration be made to the establishment of regional resource centres whereby academics could easily go and examine all the different sets of materials concurrently. It was also suggested that financial backing might be obtained from several sources.

During the Asian Development Bank sponsored Regional Seminar on Distance Education held at STOU from 26 November to 3 December 1986, the issue of a regional resource centre was also widely discussed by the participants.

In November of 1987 the Asian Association of Open Universities was established, and it was at the first Session of this Conference at STOU that the representative of UNESCO Principal Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific stressed the importance of establishing a regional resource centre and assured the AAOU members of UNESCO PROAP's assistance. At the second Session held in Tokyo, it was agreed upon by all AAOU member institutions that the regional resource centre be set up for the further development and promotion of distance education in Asia and the Pacific region.

This, then, brings us to the present and today's Regional Seminar on Establishment of a Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education. Through close co-ordination between UNESCO, which has so generously sponsored this seminar, the host, STOU, and the other distinguished participants we are now witnessing the beginning of a new stage in the progress of distance education in Asia and the Pacific.

The Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education, similar to the International Centre for Distance Learning, will serve as a documentation and information centre, compiling, exchanging and disseminating information on distance education and serve as a centre for the promotion of research and development in distance education in Asia and the Pacific. In addition, I feel that this aspect of the centre is most important, it will also organize training programmes, conferences, seminars, workshops, attachments and observations for AAOU members, institutions, groups or individuals, and joint production of instructional packages and other media for such programmes to promote closer co-operation

and effective sharing of experiences among member institutions. The translation of materials into English will also be undertaken, although the documents in their original language will be stored at the centre.

It is envisioned that the Regional Resource Centre in Distance Education will eventually be computerized, thus facilitating access for interested persons living in areas both inside and outside the Asia-Pacific region. This, of course, will entail much work, co-ordination, and co-operation among all those who will be involved with the operations of the centre, and as it is to become an extension of the AAOU, all member institutions will need to put forth all their efforts to see that the centre prospers and remains permanent.

It remains to be seen exactly in what form the Regional Resource Centre is to evolve in terms of objectives, structure, function, management, etc., but given the expertise that is to be present during the duration of this seminar and the papers which were previously prepared by the participants, I anticipate a very successful conclusion to this seminar and the Foundations of a Regional Resource Centre to arise, ultimately becoming one of the most beneficial and functional institutions concerned with distance education in this region.

Therefore, may I take this opportunity to thank all of the participants who have committed their time, endeavors and assistance to convene for the purpose this seminar was organized. I am confident that your achievements over the next five days will enhance the standards which you uphold for the future of distance education in the Asia-Pacific region.

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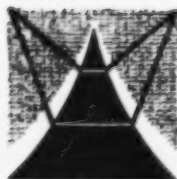
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